

QA-362

Slippery Hill Battlefield Site
Grasonville vicinity
Private

1813

The Battle of Slippery Hill was actually a very brief skirmish which occurred when a large force of British infantry advanced on and occupied Queenstown. It took place early in the morning of August 13, 1813 along the main road from Kent Narrows to Queenstown. A small troop of approximately 20 men were stationed just east of Grasonville, serving as an advance picket to watch the road. Faced with an advancing column of 2000 British infantry, the picket guard opened fire, repeated a second round and then retreated. The British force was thrown into confusion and had to fall back and regroup before resuming their march, which led on the following day to the occupation of Queenstown.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Slippery Hill Battlefield Site

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Southeast side of Route 18 west of Bennett Point Road

CITY, TOWN

Grasonville

☒ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Queen Anne's

3 CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY**☐ DISTRICT☐ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☒ SITE☐ OBJECT**OWNERSHIP**☐ PUBLIC☒ PRIVATE☐ BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS**☐ OCCUPIED☒ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE**☒ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO**PRESENT USE**☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☐ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☒ OTHER WOODS**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Sudler's Neck Farms, Inc.

Telephone #:

STREET & NUMBER

c/o J. Edgar Bryan

CITY, TOWN

Queenstown

☐ VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

Maryland 21658

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC Queen Anne's County Courthouse

Liber #: CWC 32

Folio #: 576

STREET & NUMBER

Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN

Centreville

STATE

Maryland 21617

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CF-562

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT ☐ DETERIORATED
☐ GOOD ☐ RUINS
☐ FAIR ☒ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☐ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☐ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The traditionally accepted site of the Battle of Slippery Hill lies in a wooded area along the southeast side of Route 18 just west of Bennett Point Road. There is a ditch or ravine in close proximity to the road which is believed to be a trench dug by the advance picket and used in the initial engagement. This trench is about 100 yards long, 3 to 5 feet deep, and 3 to 15 feet wide. It is overgrown with mature hardwood trees. Although it is basically indistinguishable from a ravine or drainage ditch, the surrounding topography and the absence of flowing water lend credence to claims of authenticity.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Battle of Slippery Hill was actually a very brief skirmish which occurred during the War of 1812 when a large force of British infantry advanced on and occupied Queenstown. In the summer of 1813, the British fleet was in virtually complete control of the Chesapeake Bay, and had landed a large force on Kent Island in early August. Because of its relative isolation from the mainland and its central location, Kent Island made an excellent base for British operations in the upper Bay. A force estimated at 2,000 troops settled down on the Island, and occasional forays were launched into the surrounding counties.

The occupation of Queenstown was intended to subdue a force of American militia known to be stationed there. This force consisted of the 38th Militia Regiment, under the command of Lt. Colonel Thomas Wright. It numbered 244 infantry,

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

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9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE

COUNTY

STATE

COUNTY

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Orlando Ridout V, Historic Sites Surveyor

ORGANIZATION

Queen Anne's County Historical Society

DATE

11/14/78

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Centreville

STATE

Maryland 21617

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 267-1438

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.1 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

two artillery pieces with a company of 35, and 100 cavalry. All of the men were from Queen Anne's County, and had been stationed at Queenstown in anticipation of British incursions to the mainland.

In an attempt to neutralize this militia, the British command determined to send a large force to Queenstown in hopes of capturing the militia by surprise, believing they could be taken without bloodshed. The attack was planned in two parts, with a large force of infantry marching directly on the town from Kent Narrows, while a second group was transported by barge to a point on the Chester River above Queenstown. This would cut off the militia from the rear, and leave them little choice except surrender. The attack was to begin early on the morning of August 13, 1813.

The American officers were clearly aware of the rather precarious position they were in, and had apparently made some preparations for an attack by water as well as by land. Lt. Colonel Wright was ill, and Major William H. Nicholson was in command during his absence. On August 12, Major Nicholson ordered two companies, numbering 62 men, to reconnoiter Piney Neck, a long peninsula to the south of Queenstown. This was

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.2 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

directly across from Kent Island and was a logical point for the British to land troops for an assault on Queenstown. In addition to this advance group, a picket was stationed on the main road to Kent Narrows, about two miles west of Queenstown. It was this advance picket that first detected and engaged the British force.

It is fortunate that a number of first-hand accounts of this engagement have been preserved. Major Thomas Emory, in command of the American cavalry unit, reported the events in two separate letters published in the Easton Star in the days following. A longer and more detailed account may be found in the report of Major Nicholson. Of particular interest is a report by a British officer, who described the reaction of the British column at Slippery Hill, and summarized the subsequent occupation of Queenstown.⁽¹⁾ Because of the thoroughness of Major Nicholson's report, a lengthy excerpt is included here, describing the engagement and forced withdrawal:

...In the course of the afternoon of the 12th, a variety of circumstances combined to induce me to believe that I should be attacked the

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.3 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

next morning, and that chiefly, if not altogether on the land side, I therefore took my officers separately and pointed out to each of them the positions their men were to occupy on the land side, in the event of an attack by land, and the same if attacked by water. We were unanimously of opinion, that the posts selected were of such strength, as to enable us to do great execution to a much larger force than our own; and against anything like an equal force, we felt confident of success - Against an attack from 2 or 3 points, I felt the insufficiency of my force to provide, and did not attempt it - Having dispatched Adjutant Tilghman, and one or two officers into the neck, about 11 o'clock, and having finished visiting my guards about $\frac{1}{2}$ past 12, I retired to my room - At $\frac{1}{2}$ past 1 o'clock, the Adjutant returned from reconnoitering, without having gained any information of the enemy's intentions - At 10 minutes before 3 o'clock of the 13th I was aroused by the quick approach of horsemen,

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.4 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

and found them to be my Cavalry videts of the out posts, with the intelligence that the enemy was approaching in great force on the main road from Kent Narrows to Queen's Town - I immediately called up my officers, and at 15 minutes past 3, my force paraded in order of battle, with the exception of the Cavalry - The want of accomodations for the men and horses, compelled me to quarter them about 1½ miles from the village - but this occasioned no delay; for in the course of 10 or 15 minutes Major Emory, in person, (much to the honor of that body) reported his Cavalry as formed on the ground I had directed, and ready for an action - A few minutes only had elapsed, when an express arrived to me from Captains Hobbs and Taylor, with the information that the enemy was advancing in such force, as to make it impossible that I could oppose them with mine; and that they expected to effect a safe retreat - This intelligence created great anxiety for the fate of my picquet guard, which was stationed about 2 miles in advance of Queen's Town, on the road by which the enemy

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.5 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

was approaching - I immediately mounted my horse, and pressed forward towards my picquet- When I had advanced within $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile of the post, the firing commenced between them and the enemy- and the volleys of musquetry left me without hope that an individual of them was alive- I returned immediately to my main body, and found them at their posts, all cheerful and anxious for the onset of the enemy, notwithstanding his numbers- a fresh volley of musquetry created feelings which I can never forget, it assured me that my picquet was not annihilated as I supposed, but (to their immortal honor) that they had abused my orders of the night before, rallied, and a second time attacked the enemy__ I instantly sent the Adjutant on to meet them, and they arrived safe at our line, about 400 yards in advance of the enemy without the loss of a man, and only one very slightly wounded__ If anything I could say, would add to the reputation of those gentlemen, how freely would I say it. In giving their

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8.6 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

names to the public, I do all that I can;
It shall be known, that a picquet guard
composed of the following gentlemen, stood
firm at their posts, received the attack,
and returned the fire of a column of British
troops 2000 strong, supported by 4 field
pieces, retreated, formed again, and gave
the enemy their second fire.

Picket Guard - Capts. James Massey, J. H.
Nicholson, Jr.

Privates - James D. Emory, Solomon E. Wright,
James Chairs, Samuel Green, W. Seward
(slightly wounded), Thomas DeRoachbroome,
Jeremiah Vincent, Peter Ross, Samuel McCosh,
John Green, Dennis Sullivan, John Hassett,
James Jackson, Jacob Price, John Dodd,
Thomas Cox, William Emerson, Archibald Roe.

About 4 o'clock, my cavalry videts,
stationed on Chester river came in, bringing
the painful intelligence that a large number
of barges were entering Queen's Town creek.

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.7 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In a few minutes after a signal rocket from the barges told me the news too true; at the same moment, one of my guards stationed on the creek came with the information that they had formed their line across the mouth of Queen's Town Creek. The signal rocket was answered from the land side, and I instantly called in all my guard except three, out of twenty, stationed at Mr. Hall's landing on the creek, who I left for the purpose of conveying intelligence to me of the enemy's approach; for I was firmly resolved to engage the enemy in my front, if it could be done without subjecting the force I commanded to certain capture. I had sent Major Blake to take a view of the enemy on the water, who returned with the information that they had landed and that he was fired on by them. The force in my front was about 150 yards from us, and was plainly seen from both my left and right flanks. In this situation, I concluded, that nothing but a silent retreat could effect my escape this I ordered, and

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.8 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

dispatched the surgeon of the regiment to major Emory of the cavalry with the order; but for some misconception of the surgeon, Major Emory did not consider the order as official; and, of course, did not commence his retreat with that promptness of movement, for which his command is remarkable. I discovered the delay, and as soon as possible sent on the adjutant, with orders for the cavalry to press their retreat; this was done under a heavy fire of rockets, round, and grape shot, equally upon the cavalry, infantry, and artillery, from the enemy's land force, and from a fire of rockets, round and grape shot, upon the infantry and artillery, from the force on the water side. There was no confusion among any of the troops; all retreated in perfect order, and the column was well formed (for militia) during the whole retreat; indeed it became absolutely necessary to give a positive order to quicken their pace before I could effect it...The head of the column having reached the appointed place

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8.9 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

of rendezvous, about one and a half miles from the town, I was riding very leisurely along in the rear with the adjutant, and had just ordered him to ride forward and halt the column, when information was sent to me, by a person who had been on the water's edge during the whole time, that the enemy were landing a large force from twenty barges on a point of Mr. Wright's. I was well aware, that the landing a force at that place could have no other object in view, but the intercepting my retreat, and I instantly ordered the head of the column to advance and continue the retreat to this place, where every man arrived in safety. The firing of my picquet guards killed two of the enemy, and wounded five; and their commander in chief Sir, Sidney Beckwith, had his horse killed. The deserters, who were with the land force, state their numbers to have been, one company of marine artillery (4 pieces) 100 strong; the 102d regiment of foot, 300 strong; 2 battallions of marines 1600, and one rocket company 50

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8.10 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

strong. This was the force in my front to which I had determined to give battle, but the appearance of the enemy attacking my rear, compelled me to give up my intention. His number by water not known; but was contained in 45 barges, and by those who had the best opportunity of expressing, is stated to have been a least 1350. It affords me great pleasure to add that captains Hobbs and Taylor made good their retreat across Wye river in batteaws and canoes; and the troopers who were under their command effected theirs by swimming their horses across...(2)

In his closing statement, Major Nicholson felt compelled to justify his withdrawal, and requested a Board of Inquiry to determine whether his actions were correct. Evidently his actions were not questioned, however, and in view of both the size and deployment of the British forces he was left with no other reasonable alternative.

The British account of the affair is provided by a Captain Robertson, one of the officers on the

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.11 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

expedition:

...Kent Island, separated from the mainland shore by a narrow strait, next became an object. After the attack on Hampton, Va., Napier landing there with his own regiment and the marine artillery marched across the island and seized the Fort of Kent Narrows. Beckwith followed with the main body, and the whole were huddled in the woods. This was an aimless enterprise of some militia encamped at Queen's Town, seven miles off. For this, one battalion of marines with artillery was embarked in the night, to land high up in the bay and take their camp in reverse. The remainder of the troops, with two guns, were to pass the ferry at midnight and march straight against the town, guided by Captain Robertson, who had got acquainted with the road by going in with a flag of truce. This combination failed entirely; the boats with the detachment missed the landing point, and returned, and the officer with the

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.12 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

advanced guard disobeyed Napier's orders, which were calculated to capture the American out-post without a shot being fired. He had come suddenly upon an American vidette, and irresolutely suffered him to fire and gallop off. The vidette was followed by the picquet, which would otherwise have been surprised, and the English officer, in a disgracefully incapable state, ordered his men to fire, throwing himself on the ground; then the whole advanced guard commenced firing, which brought up Beckwith and Napier at a gallop to ascertain the cause. This done they ordered Captain Robertson to take command, and stop the firing, while they went to restore order in the rear; but the mischief had already spread there; for the men, seeing the road suddenly lighted up by the firing in the front, while the reverberating sounds seemed to spread around them, were panic-stricken, and in column as they were, fired right and left, shooting each other.

Beckwith ordered the band to play, and

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.13 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

resumed the march, but at every turn the American patriots fired, and the panic returned. Then a fresh company was pushed in front, and Beckwith and Napier took the advance. Beckwith's horse was shot, and Napier was then dangerously exposed, as the only mounted man. Captain Robertson earnestly entreated him to alight, calling to his recollection what had happened at the battle of Busaco; he, however, refused, saying "the state of the troops would not allow of care for himself". At dawn Queenstown was reached, and a hundred American horsemen, were seen half a mile to the left, but being plied by Captain Robertson with some shots and rockets, fled; their infantry had previously gone off with two field guns. The enemy's captain of artillery (Capt. Gustavus Wright), who thus retired, had been a few days before received with a flag of truce, and on that occasion invited the British to fight, going so far as to offer single combat to

CONTINUATION SHEET

8.14 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Captain Robertson; he now fled without firing a shot, though he might have used his guns effectually and safely, being beyond musquetry, and Beckwith had no cavalry. The projects of Sir J. Warren at whose entire disposal Beckwith and his troops were placed, were now exhausted, and he had done nothing. (3)

The British occupied Queenstown, and although acts of vandalism were reported, particularly at Bowlingly, the town was spared the destruction suffered in other locales. Soon after this skirmish, the British abandoned Kent Island, and by late August they had withdrawn from the upper Chesapeake.

The engagements fought at Queenstown and at St. Michaels were relatively minor in the overall defense of the Bay, but were apparently contributing factors in the British decision to curtail their operations. The fleet was sent to Halifax, apparently to escape the August heat and an outbreak of fever, and no further trouble occurred in Queen Anne's County. (4)

Footnotes

- (1) Excerpts of all four documents may be found in Emory, Queen Anne's County, Maryland, p. 430-36. Transcribed copies of the two letters from Major Emory and the report of Major Nicholson were made available by Dr. Harry C. Rhodes of Queenstown.
- (2) Letter of Major William H. Nicholson to Lt. Col. Thomas Wright, dated Centreville, 16 August 1813. Several differences are to be found between the excerpts published in Emory and the complete transcribed copies. In particular, there are several disagreements in the names of soldiers involved at Slippery Hill. The account included here is taken from Dr. Rhodes' transcript.
- (3) Published in The Life of General Sir Charles James Napier by Lieut. General Sir W. Napier, K. C. B., Vol. 1, pages 215-216.
- (4) See Mahon, John K. The War of 1812 Gainesville, 1972. p. 21.





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Slippery Hill Battlefield Site

ORV 11/1978

Neg. on file @ MHT



QA-362 Slippy's Hill
Queentown vic.
ORV 1979